

THE TEXT-BASED APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the Text-Based Approach to Language Teaching and Learning (TBTL) in which text as the key focus is viewed through the prism of linguistics and pedagogics and is determined as the main didactic unit that serves as a goal and a result of a communicative interaction (addresser-material-addressee). Text is considered the means of communication and a way of storing and conveying information. The quality of text hinges upon how ably a communicant follows the particular structural, syntactical, morphological, and stylistic text-building rules. Being a unit of communication, text can be used for educational purposes in EFL classrooms and thus, can be studied as a linguistic object, vehicle for information, and a springboard for production. The text as a teaching/learning material should be selected according to the didactic and methodological text selection principles and the work with a text should go through four stages: familiarization, reading, text analysis, and production. Working with a text in the framework of the TBTL is regarded as effective, because the TBTL is an integrated communication-oriented approach, which enables learners to perceive, understand, and interpret a text and on its basis to create an authentic text: the one similar to the source text or absolutely independent. The way to the independent construction of the text goes through four stages: building a context, modelling, joint construction of the text, and finally independent construction of the text. On the example of the work with ONE text the author of the article demonstrates how the four language skills are developed through text. The activities analyzed show how the four skills can be integrated with the use of receptive, receptive-and-reproductive, receptive-and-productive, and productive exercises. The advantages of integrated activities are significant: they develop basic skills, provide a deep understanding of content, form a critical thinker, encourage learners to communicate. The output of the TBTL is an authentic independent text creation, not an "average" text, but the text of a certain type and genre which proves that the TBTL involves genre-based teaching. The practical value of the text-building process lies in learner's autonomy: it is obvious that to create their own text, learners should elaborate a number of texts, but the positive side of this proces, is that learners may select texts out of interests, work with texts beyond the boundaries of the syllabus and the borders of the classroom, be independent from the textbook and teachers's directions. And this is a good springboard for critical thinking and creativity.

Key words: TBTL (Text-Based Teaching and Learning), text selection principles, stages of work with a text, unit of communication, integrated skills, genre-based teaching, learner's autonomy.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Text as a communicative unit

The contemporary linguistics considers **text** as a coherence of the verbal signs, just as the pedagogics, which states that "text" is the main didactic unit that serves as a goal and a result of a communicative interaction. The interaction is determined by the *three-*

dimensional features of text (Vygotsky 1956: 378) [8]: addresser (author) – material (spoken or written) – addressee (listener/viewer or reader). These features confirm the fact that a "text" is a complex communicative unit, created for a particular purpose and adequately interpreted on condition that its theme and idea are clearly defined (I.Nyoman Arimbawa 2012) [3]. Hence, text are the *means* of communication

as well as a *way* of storing and conveying information. Monitoring the conduct of an average speaker one can make conclusion that people say things, using whole texts or some phrases extracted from a text, since speech rests upon a situation. It is a situation that encourages people to build their utterance as a single entity, not isolated words (lists of vocabulary items) or groups of words (grammar structures). And it is a situation that anticipates the purpose to text and the quality of the text – that is to say, a person may have fun with texts, make and/or break relationships with texts, make arrangements, honor and/or humiliate people, communicate (tweeting, facebooking, podding, kindling etc.) (Mickan 2015) [4].

The quality of text (utterance) hinges upon how ably a communicant follows the particular structural, syntactical, morphological, and stylistic text-building rules. Knowing and following these rules, a communicant can mess around with a text, making it more or less formal in terms of register, but the contents of their text will always reflect the individual, social, political, and cultural background of a text-builder [1]. Summing up, a “text” is the source of information and the unit of communication which determine the strategy and tactics of one or several communicants.

As the source of information, text can be based either on the *discloser* (such a text describes an event or a phenomenon), or the *discloser and assessment* (such a text describes an event or a phenomenon and provides the author’s assessment), or the *discloser, imagery, and assessment* (such a text describes an event or a phenomenon, provides their emotional coloring and the author’s assessment). Regardless of its typology, text should be *coherent* – should contain the theme and the main idea, have a good structure and organization; *connected* – should demonstrate the development of the thought in the text on the level of a sentence, groups of sentences, one paragraph and several paragraphs; *divisible* – should be easily divided into extracts with logical outcomes. In other words, a common concept, a relative completeness, and an internal structure (syntactical, logical, and compositional) are the characteristics to be inculcated in a text.

As it has been mentioned above, a text is a unit of communication, therefore it can be used for educational purposes in EFL classrooms. As learning material, text should be selected according to the requirements. The minimum requirements for the

contents of text can be laid down as follows: a text should be informative, interesting, age sensitive, and actual for solving learning tasks. A brief text can be used promptly, in the classroom, whereas a longer text, – as a home reading. Notwithstanding the place to read, the text read should be discussed in the classroom, since reading is meaningful and purposeful. Reading drives interest in the theme and thoughts presented in the text; furthers the discussion of important issues; helps achieving communicative, educational, and general developing aims of learning. Moreover, reading develops both language and speech, activates ethical, esthetical, cultural, professional and other aspects.

1.2. Approaches and methods in education sciences

Both Soviet and post-Soviet teaching methodology distinguishes between the notions of “approach” and “method” (Azimov&Shchukin 1999: 225-226) [7], stating that an **approach** is a basic category of the teaching methodology which on the one hand, determines a learning strategy and on the other, – the choice of the particular method that realizes this strategy. As we may see, a **method** serves as a tactical model of learning process, since it implements this or that approach. It appears from the above that an approach is a more inclusive term, compared with a method, therefore both can be a subject of study. Regarding the notion of “approach”, M.Liakhovitsky (1981) marks out four of them [10]:

1) *behavioristic*, which considers a language as a behavior and affirms that it can be learnt via positive or negative reinforcement;

2) *inductively-conscious*, which claims that a language consists of various sets of models and functions that should be acquired by a learner;

3) *cognitive*, which is based on the consequence of a language learning: from knowledge (rules and instructions), through the acquired habits (controlled actions with the knowledge gained) to the skills (ability to use in practice the knowledge and habits obtained);

4) *integrated*, which stands for a parallel acquisitions of knowledge, habits and skills and is based on a bond between conscious and subconscious components of learning process.

The approaches highlighted later (e.g. direct, indirect, grammar, reading, collective and individualized, communicative etc.) can be squeezed in the ideology of the aforementioned approaches, therefore needless to describe them in this paper.

Method is viewed as a general didactic or/and particular methodological notion, since it depends on the subject it is applied to. Thus, dealing with the process of language teaching/learning, the scholar looks at method through the prism of a methodological category as it reflects the peculiar features of the subject “Language” – more specifically, language aspects or language skills. Summarizing all of the mentioned above it is necessary to admit that method should be considered as a bilateral process of interaction between a teacher and their students and be aimed at reaching the final goal. (Azimov&Shchukin 1999: 147-148) [7]. The choice of a method depends on the final goal, intermediate aims and sub-aims, learning conditions, number of students in a group, their age, abilities, motivation, interests, needs etc. Mention should be made here of the necessity to *choose*, not to work out a new method. This reflects the fact that method has a special quality: it is congruent or has the ability to integrate with existing methods. For this reason, there is no need to create a new method. Instead, it is necessary to study the existing methods and to learn combine them within an appropriate approach.

There are dozens of methods of teaching which appeared as a response to the language teaching/learning demands. Among them are: audiolingual, audiovisual, natural, grammar-translation, active, methods of projects, immersion, Case Study, TTT, TBL, CLIL to name a few. Studying these methods in depth one can find out a tendency in the development of method, which has a lot to do with a convergence of various methods with the urge to find the best solution for the specific environment.

1.3. The structural framework of the Text-Based Teaching and Learning (TBTL)

Text-Based Teaching and Learning (TBTL) is an integrated communication-oriented approach which enables learners to perceive, understand, and interpret the text and on its basis to design an authentic text: the one similar to the original text or absolutely

independent. In other words, TBTL *firstly*, explores the interaction between the learner and the text; *secondly*, provides an opportunity for an in-depth study of the threefold nature and purpose of a text: text as a linguistic object, text as a vehicle for information, and text as a springboard for production; *thirdly*, facilitates the process of forming a competent critical reader, writer, reviewer, and designer of texts [1], [5]. Reviewing in detail the threefold nature and purpose of text, it can be observed that: (Valerija Marina&Auksė Marmienė 2006: 99-105) [5]

– *text as a linguistic object* helps learners to estimate and analyze a text: a) to understand how it is constructed (i.e. a text is authentic or adapted); and b) why it is produced (i.e. a text is written for a certain purpose);

– *text as a vehicle for information* motivates learners a) to understand how it impacts on its readers and who is the potential reader of this text and b) encourages discussion;

– *text as a springboard for production* stimulates for creation, i.e. encourages learners to discuss the issues, mentioned in the text, to perform some episode(s) from the text, to write a response, to make a report using the information from the text or referring to it.

To sum up, the TBTL familiarizes learners with a range of genre, the format, layout, and structure of a text, provides the models of vocabulary units, grammar structures, functions and register which are typical for this or that kind of text; demonstrates by means of a language or images – implicitly or explicitly – socio-cultural and political values, attitudes, and beliefs; contributes to interpreting and responding to the main points of a text; helps learners to understand metalanguage in order to use the words from a text in further discussion of what was read and on this ground to create an independent text [1] Advantages and disadvantages of the TBTL can be presented as a clear table (Table 1).

Table 1 – TBTL: pros and cons (after J.C.Richards 2019) [6]

Text-Based Approach to Language Teaching and Learning		
Advantages	Disadvantages	Possible solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Texts are chosen as the framework for teaching. – Focuses on the products of learning rather than the processes involved. – Facilitates the text-building process due to the process of scaffolding. – Provides structured sequences of language that are used in specific contexts in specific ways. – Focuses on developing the four skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) in relation to whole text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of texts based on models may be repetitive and boring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Should be used flexibly

Despite a significant weakness of the TBTL, its positive sides dominate. Thus, it can be reported that using the TBTL, learners develop their discourse competence as they know how to use the text types in specific contexts for meaningful communication (spoken or written). It is therefore for that reason that the implementation of the TBTL involving the effective methods of teaching in EFL classrooms needs to be promoted.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Reading for communication purposes

As stated earlier, reading is a purposeful activity and through whole text learners can develop their language skills that are crucial for meaningful communication (J.C.Richards 2019) [6]. That proves the statement about the communication-oriented nature of the process of reading. People read for pleasure or for working/learning purposes and tend to talk about what they have read. Therefore text can be used as a teaching tool in the EFL classroom. Choosing a text as a learning material it is urgent to follow the text selection principles, as each text should be selected in compliance with the minimum requirements for the contents of text, described in item 1.1.; meet demands in a fast-changing curriculum/syllabus and conform to the fundamental didactic and methodological principles [Liakh 1981] [10] (A.Kibrik 2016) [9]:

1. Didactic principles:

- *authenticity*: text should be created by a native speaker but can be adapted for teaching/learning purposes;

- *informative value*: the contents of text should trigger interest and call for a review of literary concepts (plot, setting, theme, tone, characters etc.);

- *accessibility*: text should meet the expectations of learners and correspond to the level of their linguistic training;

- *quantitative sufficiency*: a number of texts should be optimal for language skills development;

- *intercultural specificity*: text should enable learners to compare the phenomena of the native and foreign pictures of the world.

2. Methodological principles:

- *functionality*: text should have a communicative value and highlight a particular topic/ situation;

- *lexical and grammatical sufficiency*: text should provide learners with guided practice (contain active vocabulary to be used in further discussions of the issues, described in the text);

- *semantic completeness*: the contents of text should contribute to the formation of particular ideas through whole text;

- *genre-and-stylistic diversity*: texts should encompass various types and functional styles;

– *effectiveness*: the contents of exts should be relevant to the learning aims/sub-aims and focus on the development of particular language skills.

The work with a text is an another important issue. There are several approaches to text studies and a number of types of reading. Let us consider the approaches to text studies, setting aside the types of reading, since the choice of this or that type of reading depends on goals, aims/sub-aims of a particular lesson.

For instance, L.Vygotsky (1956) [8] claims that there are six approaches to text studies (L.Vygotsky 1956: 378) [8]: *socio-historical, socio-psychological, linguistic, functional-and-stylistic, communicative, and cognitive*. The practical use of the TBTL has led to the conclusion that a communicative approach to text studies can be considered as dominant. That is evidenced by the fact that the other approaches find their embodiment in the four stages of work with a text (Table 2) [2]:

Table 2 – Stages of work with a text (after M.Denysenko&al. 2007)

Stage 1 FAMILIARIZATION	Stage 3 TEXT ANALYSIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – learning dialogue (possible interactions: Teacher-Learner, Teacher-Class, Learner- Learner) as a lead-in; – alleviations of various language difficulties the learners may face (lexical, grammatical, stylistic, difficulties connected with the plot or general understanding of the whole text etc.); – revitalization of background knowledge (depending on the goal, aims/sub-aims of the lesson as well as the text theme and plot) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>linguistic</i>, which includes morphological analysis, syntactical figures of text, work with mechanics and punctuation; – <i>stylistic</i>, which includes the analysis of style and type of speech, stylistic devices, – <i>literary concept</i>, which includes the definition of main idea; understanding of plot, setting, theme, tone, etc.; description of a character, an event, behaviour, etc.); – <i>culture point</i>, which enables learners to compare the phenomena of the native and foreign pictures of the world
Stage 2 READING	Stage 4 PRODUCTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – providing instructions (learners must know <i>why</i> they should read and <i>how</i> they should read it) to avoid numerous references to the text (re-reading) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – project work (creation of a similar or/and authentic text), which assists in developing a critical reader, thinker, and writer

As shown in Table 2 [2], the activities mentioned in Stage 1 should be shaped into pre-reading tasks, Stage 2, – into while-reading instructions, Stages 3 and 4 – into post-reading tasks.

Very interesting ideas have also been launched by I.Nyoman Arimbawa (2012) [3]. Speaking about the stages of work with a text, the scholar mainly *emphasizes* the activities that can be considered useful on the way from the text perception to the independent construction of a text and *highlights* four tiers in that process:

1. *Building the context*: on this tier preparation activities are suggested (brainstorming, predictions, eliciting, vocabulary development etc.).

2. *Modelling*: on this tier learners talk about the text, its structure, linguistic features etc.

3. *Joint construction of the text*: on this tier learners develop a certain type of text, using the text read as the scaffolding.

4. *Independent construction of the text*: on this tier learners work independently, without referring to the specific indicators of the source text.

Having analysed the ideas, raised by the two scholars, it is important to note that the TBTL *output* is the construction of an independent text *of a certain type and genre*, not an “average” text, which proves the fact that the TBTL resting upon the communicative approach to text studies, involves *genre-based teaching*, which focuses on spoken and written genres, using authentic examples as models [4]. Thus, all elements of the source text should be examined in depth and finally implemented on the productive tier of a text-building process.

2.2. Using a text to promote integrated skills

The process of integration can be described as the process of combining two or more things together. In our case, we would like to integrate the four language skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking through text. As it was mentioned above, text can be represented in the written or spoken form and its understanding can be verified through speaking, writing or reading. Taking into consideration the fact that our source text is written, the activities that can be suggested on its contents will find their realization in speaking or/and writing, directly (learners express their ideas based on the text in spoken or written form), as well as listening, indirectly (learners listen to each other during speaking activities). The advantages of integrated activities are significant: they develop basic skills, provide a deep understanding of content, form a critical thinker, encourage learners to communicate.

In accordance with the contents of text, teacher may integrate reading with the other three skills (speaking, reading, listening) or with systems (vocabulary, grammar, phonology, mechanics) and consequently choose/ design appropriate tasks and exercises. Thus, *receptive exercises* are aimed at the development of reading skills; *receptive-and-reproductive exercises*, – at the development of systems; *receptive-and-productive exercises*, – at the development of the integrated skills through whole text; and *productive exercises*, – at the development of speaking and writing skills, directly and listening, indirectly, without referring to the source text.

Here is an example of the activities that help learners develop their integrated skills, using the text with a cultural component (M.Denysenko&al 2007: 15-23) [2].

Text: The Passion and the Magic: Distinction of Arabic Folktales

The text is borrowed from: Hassan Fatme Sharafeddine // Al Jadid. – 1995. – Vol.1. – No 1.

Level: B1-B2

Teaching point: superstitions, proverbs, simple tenses, adjectives, nouns, synonyms, prepositions

Integrated activities: 1) reading and grammar; 2) reading and speaking.

Stages of work with the text:

1. *Familiarization (pre-reading stage):*

1.1. *Before You Read:* Learners read several examples of Yemeni superstitions and using their background knowledge try to find very Arabic colouring in them. This activity belongs to the first tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text and integrates reading and speaking (receptive-and-productive exercise).

1.2. *At First Glance:* Learners read the first sentence from the text and describe the peculiar features of Arabic folklore. Then, compare it to their native folklore. These activities also belong to the first tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text and integrate reading and speaking (receptive-and-productive exercises).

As the text is rich in collocations, i.e. adjectives (*all-powerful, supernatural, unique, political etc.*) and nouns (*benefits, customs, legend, forces etc.*), learners are suggested to match the adjectives and nouns to create the meaningful collocations. This activity broadens learner's active vocabulary and alleviates lexico-grammatical difficulties they may face. On the whole, such an activity also belongs to the first tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text and focuses on the systems: grammar and vocabulary (receptive-and-reproductive exercise).

The final exercise at this stage is the anticipation of the meaning and the form of a word from the context. This activity also belongs to the first tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text and focuses on the systems: grammar and vocabulary (receptive-and-reproductive exercise).

2. *Reading (while-reading stage):*

2.1. The text is accompanied by a clear and precise *instruction*, which helps learners concentrate on the necessary details of the text. This is a pure receptive exercise.

2.2. Learners read and fill in the *chart* with necessary details from the text that will be used in further discussions. This is a receptive-and-reproductive exercise.

3. *Analysis (post-reading stage):*

3.1. *Understanding the Text: Retelling the Article:* while reading, learners filled in the chart with necessary information from the text which at this very stage serves as a good scaffolding in retelling the text. This activity belongs to the second tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text, called

Modelling and focuses on the integration of reading the chart and speaking (receptive-and-reproductive exercise).

3.2. *Understanding the Text: Analysis*: learners think about what they have read and in pairs or groups discuss it. This activity also belongs to the *Modelling* and focuses on the integration of reading the questions and speaking (receptive-and-reproductive exercise).

3.3. *Understanding the Text: Drawing Inferences*: learners in pairs or groups evaluate the statements suggested and draw inferences or conclusions, based on the information of the article. This activity also belongs to the *Modelling* and focuses on the integration of reading the statements and speaking (receptive-and-productive exercise).

3.4.-3.6. *Looking at Language*. The other three activities (3.4-3.6.), represented at this stage are grammar- and structure-oriented. Learners fill in the gaps with prepositions, if necessary (3.4.), work out questions (3.5.), and discuss why the author of the article uses the present simple tense to describe the events from the past (3.6.). These activities belong to the *Modelling* too, and focus on the integration of reading, writing, and speaking (receptive-and-reproductive exercises).

3.7. *Culture Points: Superstitions*: learners in pairs or groups discuss various Arabic superstitions, mentioned in the text and compare them with the superstitions existing in their culture. Then, each learner reports to the class what they found out about superstitions from their partners. These activities belong to the third tier of the process, leading to the independent construction of a text, called *Joint Construction of the text*, and focus on the integration of reading and speaking (receptive-and-production exercise), as well as listening and speaking (receptive-and-reproductive exercise).

4. *Production (post-reading and syntopical reading stage)*

4.1. *Project Work*: learners are provided with links to useful information about Arabic folklore and superstitions. Their task is to explore these sources of information and if necessary to find some more to fulfil the final task: to write a report, i.e. to create an authentic text. These activities belong to the fourth and final tier, called the *Independent Construction of a Text* and focus on the integration of the four skills: syntopical reading and/or listening – as learners have to

read and/or listen a satisfying number of texts about the same topic (receptive exercises) to write a report (productive exercise) and then to deliver a speech in front of the class (productive exercise).

The practical value of the activities, suggested at the final stage lies in learner's autonomy: it is obvious that to fulfil the task, learners have opportunities to select texts out of interests, they may work with texts beyond the boundaries of the syllabus and the borders of the classroom, they are not dependent on the textbook and teachers's directions [4]. And this is a good springboard for critical thinking and creativity.

Thus, the analysis of the tasks and exercises, suggested at the before-, while-, and after- reading stages that accompany the text to read demonstrates how the TBTL can be realized in EFL classroom.

2.3. Conclusion

Instead of the conclusion, it would be pertinent to quote Peter Mican (2015) who said that the TBTL “conceptualizes language as a human resource for making meanings. Teaching is characterized by natural language use. Teachers choose texts relevant to learners' purposes. They select texts of interest to learners and of significance for fulfillment of the purposes of a syllabus. They discuss and argue about ideas for pleasure and/or for work/learning. In contrast, with senseless grammatical exercises and meaningless dialogues in structural teaching, teachers and students make sense with texts. Teaching projects learners into reacting to texts for purposes of understanding meanings, of contributing to meaning-making, and of expanding capacity to express meanings. The approach enables learners of additional languages to use a target language in ways familiar to them – with texts which are authentic, purposeful, and functional.” [4]

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